UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/1993/90
21 June 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1993
Geneva, 28 June-30 July 1993
Item 2 of the provisional agenda*

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEME:

Coordination of humanitarian assistance: emergency relief and the continuum to rehabilitation and development

Report of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its organizational session for 1993, the Economic and Social Council adopted decision 1993/205. In that decision, the Council decided that the coordination segment of the Council of 1993 should be devoted, inter alia, to the consideration of the theme entitled "Coordination of humanitarian assistance: emergency relief and the continuum to rehabilitation and development". In the same decision, the Council decided that the coordination segment would reach agreed conclusions containing specific recommendations on matters related to coordination addressed to the various parts of the United Nations system for implementation, and also decided to request the Secretary-General to apprise the Council at its substantive session of 1994 of the steps taken by the United Nations system to give effect to those recommendations.

2. Consideration of the above-mentioned theme by the coordination segment of the Economic and Social Council of 1993 will take place in the context of new arrangements for the coordination of humanitarian assistance established following the adoption by the General Assembly of its resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations". That resolution provides a comprehensive framework for the provision of humanitarian relief assistance, both in terms of the guiding principles and the modalities for relief assistance, including coordination, cooperation and leadership. In resolution 46/182, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its forty-seventh session on the implementation of that resolution; and at that session, the Assembly considered the report of the Secretary-General (A/47/595) submitted pursuant to its request. In paragraph 10 of its resolution 47/168 of 22 December 1992, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit his annual report on the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance to the Assembly at its forty-eighth session.

3. In view of the complexities and the magnitude of the tasks faced by the United Nations system in the field of humanitarian action and assistance, and in order to prepare for the consideration of the theme by the coordination segment of the Economic and Social Council of 1993, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) chose to consider the theme "Coordination of humanitarian assistance: emergency relief and the continuum to rehabilitation and development" at its first regular session of 1993, held in Rome on 19 and 20 April 1993.

4. While the overall assessment of the impact of the new arrangements set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182 will be reviewed at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council discussions are expected to focus on the coordination of relief and the continuum to rehabilitation and development. The present report, submitted pursuant to Council decision 1993/205, takes into account the deliberations of ACC. It draws on the experience gained by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat over the last year in the coordination of humanitarian assistance, and suggests steps that need to be taken to ensure that relief, rehabilitation and development are treated as an integrated whole and that relief operations do not prejudice long-term development. In view of the focus of the Council discussions, the report is not a comprehensive review of

the humanitarian assistance activities of the United Nations and does not address in detail other problems encountered by operational organizations of the system at the implementation phase. However, it should be noted that the burden of providing relief assistance at the country level falls mainly on operational organizations and the non-governmental organization community. Given the magnitude of current crises, the capacity of those organizations are being stretched to the limit.

I. COORDINATION

A. Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat

5. The adoption of General Assembly resolution 46/182 entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations" on 19 December 1991 emphasized the desire of Member States for greater coherence and timeliness in the United Nations system response to humanitarian emergencies. That resolution aimed at enhancing system-wide coordination, drawing on the comparative advantages of operational organizations of the system with a view to facilitating their emergency response.

6. In March 1992, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Mr. Jan Eliasson as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and established the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat which was entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out the tasks identified in General Assembly resolution 46/182. The primary role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs is to facilitate a coherent and coordinated response by the system to emergencies, including complex emergencies as well as natural disasters, and to help resolve coordination problems that arise at the implementation phase. Through his participation in the Secretary-General's task forces and in other regular meetings of Under-Secretaries-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs is to ensure that the humanitarian dimension is integrated within peacemaking and peace-keeping activities and that humanitarian assistance is provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality as set forth in section I, entitled "Guiding principles", of the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182.

7. Within the United Nations system, the Emergency Relief Coordinator takes the lead in securing agreement among organizations of the United Nations system on division of responsibilities. A salient point emanating from the discussion of ACC at its first regular session of 1993 was the need to examine the concept of entrusting primary responsibility in specific emergencies to the appropriate agency or organization of the United Nations system, under the coordination of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The Department will pursue this option, which has considerable potential, in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

8. The Emergency Relief Coordinator is also responsible for establishing coordination mechanisms, with regard to mounting needs assessment missions, preparing consolidated appeals and mobilizing resources. In addition he has an important role in negotiating access to populations in need. As an emergency situation develops, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs monitors the system's

response and acts as a troubleshooter in resolving problems that arise. The Department is currently examining ways of strengthening its ability to serve as the focal point for the collection and dissemination of emergency information to Member States, organizations of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations, while drawing on the capacities of the United Nations system, through the use of modern information systems.

9. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 46/182, the United Nations, under the new coordination arrangements, has been called upon to formulate and coordinate its system-wide humanitarian response, both at the Headquarters and at the country level, to a greatly increased number of emergencies. Very often these have involved humanitarian, security, political, development and human rights concerns as well as needs of internally displaced persons, steps needed to mitigate the havoc created by the many millions of land-mines scattered in conflict zones, and increasing threats to humanitarian relief personnel.

10. The Emergency Relief Coordinator, in close collaboration with concerned organizations, also has the responsibility of ensuring that emergency assistance is provided in ways that are supportive of recovery and longer-term development so as to reduce dependency on emergency relief. However, although the United Nations system has been able to help provide relief to those afflicted, the effective transition from relief to development has been impeded by the acute nature of crises often involving the breakdown of authority and the absence of viable national and local structures, ethnic tensions, abuse of human rights, continuing political instability and generally unfavourable economic conditions. At the same time, natural disasters have continued to impose a heavy toll in casualties and damage, calling for renewed efforts in the coordination of relief activities and strong action for prevention, preparedness and disaster mitigation.

11. The magnitude and the complexity of the task facing the United Nations was not fully apparent at the time of the negotiation of General Assembly resolution 46/182. Nor was the interrelationship between the political, security and humanitarian dimensions of complex emergencies and concrete ways of moving from relief to development addressed in detail in that resolution. As a result, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has found itself under heavy pressure during the first year of its existence. Nevertheless, it has been encouraged by the progress it has made, and by the intense interest shown in its work by the international community and the clearly expressed desire that humanitarian concerns be advocated in an assertive manner.

B. Prompt and effective United Nations system responses to complex emergencies

12. A key objective of the new coordination arrangements envisaged in General Assembly resolution 46/182 is to accelerate the United Nations humanitarian response to disasters and other emergencies and to facilitate the prompt and smooth delivery of relief assistance. However, while many agencies and organizations have the capacity to respond quickly and effectively and have frequently dispatched emergency teams to crisis areas, there is still a need to

improve the response of the United Nations system as a whole in the critical early phase of an emergency.

13. The provision of early warning information in such a way as to form the basis for timely decision-making by the Secretary-General is essential if the United Nations is to be able to formulate appropriate policies, take speedy preventive action in emergency-prone countries and assist agencies of the United Nations system in accelerating the provision of relief when an emergency occurs. This issue is also being addressed in the context of An Agenda for Peace (see the report of the Secretary-General (A/47/277-S/24111) on An Agenda for Peace: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping).

14. The effectiveness of the United Nations response to an emergency situation depends primarily on the quality of field-level arrangements. In most emergency-prone countries the Resident Coordinator and the in-country Disaster Management Team provide the nucleus for the United Nations response to both complex emergencies and natural disasters. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that the views of field representatives are given full weight in headquarters discussions and that those representatives receive adequate policy guidance on important developments. In cases where field structures do not exist or need to be strengthened, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs will take the lead in forging agreement on appropriate arrangements. In order to assist in the performance of this task, a survey is being made of field coordination mechanisms in emergency-prone countries.

15. Recently, emergencies have occurred in countries where there is no United Nations emergency response capacity. Consideration is being given to the desirability in certain specific emergency situations of the deployment of emergency response teams coordinated by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs under the authority of the Secretary-General. This proposed arrangement, which is to be discussed further in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, should be seen as a complement to United Nations Disaster Assistance Coordination (UNDAC), which aims at enabling the Department to quickly mobilize the expertise of Member States when natural disasters occur. Department of Humanitarian Affairs staff members may also participate in the Secretary-General's fact-finding missions to conflict areas to ensure that the humanitarian dimension is taken fully into account as recommended by the Security Council during its recent discussion of An Agenda for Peace.

C. Country-level coordination

16. The Resident Coordinator and the in-country Disaster Management Team normally provide the basis for United Nations field coordination arrangements. However, in conflict situations where the United Nations is called upon to address simultaneously political, security and humanitarian issues, it is usually necessary to make more elaborate arrangements that take account of the particular requirements of the situation. In several complex emergencies a Special Representative of the Secretary-General has been appointed to oversee the United Nations operations in their entirety. In such cases, the humanitarian component of the operation is entrusted to a Humanitarian Coordinator who forms an integral part of the structure of the Special Representative's mission.

17. In view of the diversity of models, it is critically important that the organizational arrangements and objectives of each coordination structure be carefully defined so that the responsibility and accountability of each official is clear. This information should also be communicated to all interested parties, including Member States and the non-governmental organization community. The Special Representative has overall responsibility for political, military and humanitarian questions. On operational matters, the in-country Coordinator of Humanitarian Assistance should be able to communicate directly with the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, while keeping the Special Representative fully informed.

18. The effective discharge of responsibilities for humanitarian coordination and timely response to emergencies at the field level requires a degree of delegation of authority. ACC, at its first regular session of 1993, agreed to the need to modify administrative rules to ensure this. Accordingly, procedures for the quick disbursement of funds, and for the recruitment of personnel in emergency situations, should be examined by all concerned organizations with a view to granting a wider delegation of authority to officials directly responsible for the management of emergency operations.

19. In specific emergency situations, it is often necessary to strengthen the office of the Resident Coordinator with additional personnel, who form the emergency coordination unit. This is also necessary when a Humanitarian Coordinator has been appointed. The financing of such emergency coordination units requires further consideration. While, in a few cases, costs are met from peace-keeping funds, following decisions of the Security Council, in most cases extrabudgetary resources have to be found. In the absence of such resources there are inevitably serious delays in establishing emergency units, although these are essential if a crisis is to be dealt with effectively. The Economic and Social Council may wish to review the various options (including use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) and other unearmarked resources and establishment of a mechanism whereby agencies collectively cater for coordination costs) and to recommend that the General Assembly give further guidance on this point.

D. Inter-Agency Standing Committee

20. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and its subsidiary, the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) (which prepares discussions and monitors implementation of IASC decisions), are the primary mechanisms for inter-agency coordination at the Headquarters level. IASC, in which the executive heads of all operational organizations of the United Nations system participate, is also an important forum for collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as well as with non-governmental organizations, which participate on an ad hoc basis.

21. IASC has met three times since its inception and has addressed a range of important policy questions, such as that of the United Nations response to humanitarian emergencies in the newly independent States and key functional questions such as that of internally displaced persons. Greater use should be

made, however, of its potential (with the assistance of IAWG) for the formulation of policies, strategies and operational programmes for emergencies.

22. While chaired by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, IASC is a common resource of the system and its effectiveness depends in large measure on the extent to which its members assume responsibility and perceive it as a body that facilitates their activities. It is also important to utilize the expertise and staff resources of member organizations inside and outside the United Nations system more systematically both for preparation of substantive issues to be discussed and for follow-up to decisions taken by IASC and IAWG.

23. The IASC Inter-Agency Support Unit (IASU) in Geneva will be further strengthened as the mechanism for furnishing substantive support to the IASC structure. Representatives of non-governmental organizations will participate fully in the work of the Unit. Where appropriate, Member States will be encouraged to second staff and cooperate in other ways with IASU. IASU should be able to draw on the expertise of the IASC member organizations in the preparation of policy papers on substantive issues.

E. Central Emergency Revolving Fund

24. The Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) went into operation in May 1992, with an amount of US$ 50 million financed by voluntary contributions as an integral part of the new arrangements for the coordination of humanitarian assistance, with a view to ensuring that funds were available in the crucial initial stages of an emergency. The Economic and Social Council may wish to note that in paragraph 21 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182, the Assembly called on the governing bodies of organizations and entities of the United Nations system to examine their reserve and other contingency funding arrangements for the purpose of strengthening further their operational capacities for rapid and coordinated response to emergencies.

25. Since the CERF came into existence, a total of US$ 32 million has been disbursed to five major United Nations organizations of which US$ 19 million has been reimbursed. Some concerns have been expressed about the constraints that have been experienced by operational organizations in the utilization of the CERF and the desirability of strengthening and expanding the Fund to enable it to become an even more effective instrument in expediting an early response by agencies to emergencies.

26. In paragraph 25 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182, it is stated that resources should be advanced to the operational organizations of the system on the understanding that they would reimburse the Fund in the first instance from the voluntary contributions received in response to consolidated appeals. Detailed policies and procedures were drawn up by the Secretary-General and promulgated on 22 July 1992. These provide that the CERF will be administered in accordance with the financial regulations and rules of the United Nations. They also state that the CERF may be used only for advances to United Nations organizations and entities in order to expedite the response to requests for emergency assistance; and they set out the terms under which funds may be advanced and the rules governing reimbursement.

27. Although the operational policies and procedures governing the CERF appear to be fully consistent with the intentions of Member States as expressed in General Assembly resolution 46/182, experience has suggested that from the outset of an emergency, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs should be able to play a more active role in the disbursement of funds to organizations of the system when it perceives a specific need. This would appear to be in accordance with the wish of Member States that funds should be available in the initial start-up phase of emergencies. The wording of Assembly resolution 46/182 has also been deemed to exclude advances to such organizations as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), whose request for funding in respect of the transport of displaced persons in Mozambique could not be met, even though this activity was included in the United Nations humanitarian programme.

28. While there has repeatedly been an urgent need in the past year for funds for such critical functions as special missions, needs assessment, preparation of appeals and strengthening of coordination mechanisms, for which none of the operational agencies have direct responsibility, the CERF cannot at present be used for these purposes. Various suggestions have been made as to how these requirements might be met, including a special arrangement within the Fund or the provision of resources that could be utilized only by the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

29. The Economic and Social Council may wish to consider recommending to the General Assembly possible future adjustments to the CERF, including increasing its size to take account of the current number of emergencies, modalities for possible future replenishment and desirability of advancing funds to intergovernmental organizations outside the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations, as well as provision of resources for functions for which none of the operational organizations have direct responsibility.

F. Consolidated appeals

30. Consolidated appeals, of which 21 requesting more than US$ 6 billion have been issued since early 1992, have become an important instrument for formulating a system-wide humanitarian response to emergencies. Although the process of preparation and follow-up needs to be refined and appeals should become more field-oriented, those appeals have generally been welcomed. Nevertheless, the sheer number of appeals, combined with an uneven response from the donor community, particularly to those appeals for humanitarian emergencies that are receiving little public attention, is creating new problems. Greater attention needs to be paid to ensuring that appeals take into consideration the activities of non-governmental organizations and bilateral programmes of Governments. National capacity-building, through giving Governments a lead role in appeal preparation, should, where possible, be emphasized. Ways should also be found of ensuring that unrealistic expectations, which are ultimately damaging to the reputation of the United Nations system, are not created by appeals. Consolidated appeals should be used selectively for emergencies that truly require a system-wide response. Where a coordinated response is not required, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs will encourage agencies of the United Nations system to prepare appeals for donor support that the United Nations can endorse.

31. In order to increase the credibility of consolidated appeals and improve the response to them, appeals will, in principle, be prepared at the field level with the active involvement of the Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator and the Disaster Management Team. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs, working closely with the host country, will arrange for non-governmental organizations and donors to participate as active partners in the process and to be associated with the finalization of an appeal when this is discussed at Headquarters. Development organizations and the Bretton Woods institutions will be requested to ensure that, to the extent possible, relief projects reduce vulnerability and are compatible with long-term development objectives. Where appeals contain elements that go beyond relief, the priority to be given to relief, rehabilitation and development should be clearly stated. To the extent possible, appeals should make clear which activities will be undertaken by Member States, ICRC and IOM, and non-governmental organizations.

32. In the event of lack of agreement at the inter-agency level on priorities, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs will determine which activities should be included in the appeal, with a view to achieving a more integrated and focused approach. It will also strengthen its capacity to support agencies and non-governmental organizations in the mobilization of resources as a follow-up to the consolidated appeal. Dissemination of information on resource flows and the implementation of programmes also need to be improved. Requisite steps to ensure this are currently being discussed with organizations of the system and through IASC.

33. The increasing number of emergencies combined with critical economic conditions in many donor countries have resulted in serious resource problems that are affecting the ability of the United Nations system to deal effectively with many humanitarian emergencies. ACC at its first regular session of 1993 agreed that IASC should prepare a strategy for mobilizing resources for the United Nations and the organizations of the United Nations system. Member States may also wish to offer suggestions on how this problem can be resolved. Particular account should be taken of imbalances between resources available for food and non-food needs and the priority given by many donors to those humanitarian emergencies that receive most publicity.

G. Natural disasters

34. Natural disasters have killed millions of people over the past 20 years and caused massive financial damage. In 1991 alone, 434 major natural disasters caused a loss of 162,000 lives and US$ 44 billion in economic damage. Such disasters will continue to occur with devastating impact, particularly in developing countries. Strengthening of the capacity of developing countries in disaster prevention and mitigation, as mentioned in paragraph 13 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182, is envisaged as an integral part of an improved United Nations response to natural disasters and other emergencies. However, while the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has built up a considerable expertise in the area of natural disasters, the Department's mitigation branch and the secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction have insufficient capacity to meet the prevention and preparedness requirements of developing countries. The Department is therefore reviewing, in consultation with organizations of the United Nations system, such

as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and other relevant bodies, notably the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, ways in which the expertise of these bodies can be utilized and strengthened as part of a coordinated effort to build up national capacities to prevent and prepare for disasters.

35. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs will also continue to develop the United Nations Disaster Assistance Coordination (UNDAC) stand-by teams as a means to bring to bear on Governments in the immediate-survival phase of a disaster the expertise that is available. The teams, working with the Disaster Management Team under the overall leadership of the Resident Coordinator, will assess the consequences of the disaster, advise on needs for international assistance and initiate procedures for on-site coordination.

H. Emergency information management

36. Timely information is an essential tool for decision-making by emergency managers and for mobilizing support by the international community, and it can assist in avoiding needless casualties and serious loss of property. Recent events have demonstrated the extent to which humanitarian response is geared to availability of and access to information.

37. The ability to collect, collate and disseminate information in a reliable and timely manner and in a form useful for decision-making is essential for the success of the new arrangements for the coordination of humanitarian assistance. This was acknowledged by the General Assembly in paragraph 35 (g) of the annex to its resolution 46/182, where the Assembly noted that among the responsibilities of the Emergency Relief Coordinator would be providing consolidated information, including early warning on emergencies, to all interested Governments and concerned authorities, particularly affected and disaster-prone countries, drawing on the capacities of the organizations of the system and other available sources. Much remains to be done to implement that part of the resolution. A great quantity of useful information including early warning information is available both within the United Nations system and in other national and international organizations; however, at present it is not easily accessible to emergency managers and decision makers.

38. A number of steps are currently being taken to improve emergency information management:

(a) Centralized information on humanitarian situations. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs has been designated as the focal point for collecting information on missions related to humanitarian assistance undertaken by organizations of the system;

(b) Early warning on mass flow of refugees and displaced persons. An inter-agency consultation mechanism was established under the aegis of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs following discussions in IASC in February 1993. Regular consultations are being held to review early warning information on the flow of refugees and other mass population displacements;

(c) The International Emergency Readiness and Response Information System (IERRIS). IERRIS, which is currently in the pilot project phase, could become a central management tool of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in its handling of emergencies, including natural disasters and complex emergencies. It would enhance communication among New York, Geneva and the field and facilitate access to information on field situations, status of appeals, project proposals and other data in a format that could be used by decision makers. Such a system would also enable the Department to deal speedily with inquiries from the media, thus contributing to the focusing of public and donor attention on the humanitarian work of the United Nations system.

II. ENSURING THE CONTINUUM FROM RELIEF TO REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT

39. In paragraph 40 of the annex to its resolution 46/182, the General Assembly called for emergency assistance to be provided in ways that would be supportive of recovery and long-term development. Development assistance organizations of the United Nations system including the Bretton Woods institutions should be involved at an early stage, and should within their existing mandates collaborate closely with those responsible for emergency relief and recovery. In paragraph 41 of the annex to the same resolution, the Assembly envisaged that the rehabilitation phase should be an opportunity to restructure and improve facilities and services destroyed in emergencies in order to enable them to withstand the impact of future emergencies.

40. Effective implementation of this mandate poses great challenges for the United Nations system and the international community as a whole. Relief and recovery cannot be separated from efforts to tackle the root causes of emergencies. These causes are many and complex but they are often related to civil war, breakdown of governmental institutions, ethnic strife, abuse of human rights and structural factors such as unchecked population growth, degradation of the environment, depletion of natural resources and desperate economic circumstances.

41. The creation of conditions for peace and a stable environment in complex emergency situations is fraught with difficulties; but much can still be done to ensure that relief, rehabilitation and development are treated as an integrated whole and that relief operations do not prejudice longer-term development or create a dependency syndrome among recipients. More vigorous efforts are also needed to strengthen vulnerable countries that are on the verge of sliding into emergency situations.

42. The following actions are envisaged in pursuance of the goal, as expressed in General Assembly resolution 46/182, of providing emergency assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development:

(a) Greater involvement of the main development bodies of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, in the initial stages of an emergency to ensure that needs assessments, relief programmes and consolidated appeals take full account of long-term rehabilitation and development requirements, promote local capacity-building and minimize the danger of recurring emergencies;

(b) Discussion with donors of ways of achieving optimal and integrated use of their emergency and development funds so as to ensure that bilateral programmes lessen dependency and support the efforts of the multilateral system to move beyond the emergency phase;

(c) Capacity-building in countries in receipt of humanitarian assistance, for example, through encouraging greater involvement of local emergency personnel, strengthening local organizations and working through national and local government structures;

(d) Encouragement of development organizations to make the financial, administrative and staffing provisions to enable them to initiate in a timely manner infrastructure and other rehabilitation projects required to protect the gains achieved by emergency relief programmes. Specific actions might include consideration of emergency humanitarian and rehabilitation requirements in appropriate UNDP round-table and World Bank consultative group meetings; establishment of creative funding mechanisms, such as the UNDP-administered trust fund set up by the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II); greater utilization of UNDP indicative planning figures for capacity-building and training; and strengthening of the capacity of development organizations to design and implement, through non-governmental organizations, rapid-impact rehabilitation projects;

(e) Initiation of discussions with Member States, non-governmental organizations and organizations of the United Nations system on actions that can be taken to prevent vulnerable States from sliding into emergency situations, including means of upgrading early warning mechanisms and the role of rapid-impact development projects.

III. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

43. The end of a cold war, the breakup of nations and the combination of civil war and underdevelopment have resulted in an unprecedented number of humanitarian emergencies that have tested to the limit the organizational arrangements established by the Secretary-General following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 46/182, as well as the capacities of the United Nations system. The Secretary-General, with the assistance of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, was called on to coordinate the humanitarian response to those emergencies at a time when the mechanisms for inter-agency coordination - including needs assessment, consolidated appeals, field coordination units, the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) and emergency information - were still being established and were largely untested. Although much of the work of the Emergency Relief Coordinator has been concerned with policy, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs is in no sense an operational or implementing agency: It has acquired an important role in the day-to-day coordination of humanitarian assistance operations, under the overall direction and responsibility of the Secretary-General.

44. Increasingly, humanitarian relief work is being carried out under extremely difficult security conditions, requiring in some instances the deployment of protective military contingents. The problem of providing such relief in situations of conflict where peace is still a distant prospect has not yet been

satisfactorily resolved. However in any consideration of this issue, the providing of humanitarian assistance in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality should be fully respected.

45. In addition to its work on complex emergencies, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has taken over from the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) the responsibility for building up the capacity of developing countries to prepare for sudden natural disasters and to coordinate the provision by the United Nations of emergency relief when such disasters occur. The increasing frequency and devastating effect of such disasters, many of which can be directly attributed to problems of development, accentuate the importance of this area of the Department's work. The extent of natural disasters can be measured by the hundreds of thousands of casualties - mostly in developing countries - and by the over US$ 40 billion worth of material damage that they produce per year.

46. The challenges that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has faced in its first year of operation accentuate the need for an effective coordination mechanism at the heart of the United Nations system under the leadership of the Secretary-General and on the basis of General Assembly resolution 46/182. However, this mandate can be accomplished only if the organizations of the United Nations system, other intergovernmental and regional organizations, Member States and non-governmental organizations share the responsibility for ensuring an effective response to humanitarian emergencies. The Department and the operational agencies of the United Nations system should work together to utilize fully the capacities of the system to provide relief to afflicted populations. In this context, full use should be made of the Department's potential to facilitate, including through negotiation if necessary, access by the operational organizations to emergency areas for the rapid provision of emergency relief. Non-governmental organizations, operational organizations and the Department should increase their exchange of information on activities and available resources so that they can take such information into account in their respective assessments and planning of humanitarian assistance. Recipient countries should assist in providing access to afflicted populations and take measures to protect humanitarian personnel. All Member States should ensure that their actions and those of the United Nations and their implementing partners are mutually supportive, that they themselves uphold high standards of transparency and that where there are differences over approaches and priorities these are openly and frankly discussed. The international community will thereby greatly strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to deal with and resolve humanitarian problems, the attainment of such a goal ultimately depending on the collective political will of this community.